DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 231 466 JC 830 314

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TITLE The Private Two-Year College: The Present Situation. Southern Association of Community and Junior Colleges Occasional Paper, Volume 1, Number 2.
INSTITUTION Southern Association of Community and Junior Colleges.
PUB DATE Jun 83
NOTE 6p
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Role; Declining Enrollment; *Educational Trends; Financial Problems; Postsecondary Education; *Private Colleges; *Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students

ABSTRACT

The two-year private liberal arts college, with sufficient para-professional offerings, provides an alternative for students who desire a liberal arts education with necessary career expertise, yet do not want to spend the time and money required for a baccalaureate degree. These schools serve as an important part of the American system of higher education in that they have opportunities that public schools lack to devise creative and dynamic programs; add diversity; offer competition to an otherwise all-embracing public system; provide a center of academic freedom removed from political influence; are deeply committed to liberal learning; are concerned for human and individual personality; set standards; provide educational leadership; and save money for taxpayers. Much has been written about the ultimate demise of many private colleges, and, indeed, these colleges are currently facing serious problems. They suffer from a heavy reliance upon tuition, difficulties in offering competitive salaries for quality faculty, nationwide enrollment declines, the need to respond to the changing nature of American society and business demands, and decreases in federal financial aid. In spite of these obvious difficulties, most small private colleges will survive in the 20th century and in doing so will help to ensure the continuing strength of the entire system of American higher education. (AYC)

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ED231466

SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES
OCCASIONAL PAPER

Volume 1, Number 2 June 1983

George B. Vaughan
Editor

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A segment of higher education which has been a part of the American system for more than sixty years has suddenly become extremely popular and will, before many more years have passed, become the dominant type of post-secondary degree education. This is the two-year college whose value has become apparent not only because of the current national and international financial situation but also because many students who do not plan to attend graduate school have realized that they can receive a very solid and complete education in a two-year college. Still many of them desire a liberal arts education coupled with the necessary expertise for a career or para-professional position yet do not want to spend the time or the money required for a baccalaureate degree.

Since most of the public two-year, or community colleges, are primarily interested in skill training and have an "open-door" admissions policy which brings together the "college-ready," and the "non-college ready," those who want the liberal arts with career preparedness can acquire it in one of today's two-year private liberal arts colleges. Upon graduation the two-year private college graduates are prepared for gainful employment and at no more than half the cost of attending a four-year college. The two-year private liberal arts college, with sufficient para-professional program offerings, is an idea whose time has come.

The private college in the United States preceded the state-supported and state-directed college by more than two-hundred years; however, by 1983, there were several times as many students enrolled in public colleges and universities as in private. In 1980-81 there were 12,234,644 students enrolled in higher educational institutions in the United States. Of these, 3,157,093 were enrolled in colleges encompassed by the Southern Regional Education Board. All but 511,593 of those were in public colleges and universities nationally. In those same years, there were 104 private two-year institutions in the Southern Region and 295 public two-year institutions. These private institutions enrolled 58,633 or an average of 564 students each, while the public two-year colleges enrolled 1,035,820 or an average of 3,511 each.

Yet, in spite of the extremely large difference in numbers of enrollees, the need for the private institution has never been greater than it is today. The prestigious American Association of Presidents of Independent Colleges and Universities contends that since the days of the founding of Harvard College, privately controlled colleges and universities have consistently been on the frontiers of knowledge and, additionally, on the frontier of preparing leadership to lift the American culture into a new area. John Howard, President of Rockford Institute (1982) indicates that private colleges have opportunities that public ones do not have to devise creative and dynamic programs with a religious base to meet the deeply rooted and pervasive confusion about values and priorities in American society. Private colleges have the greatest opportunity to proclaim a vision of the good life and outline the requirements of a viable and responsible free society. Howard furthermore extolls the virtue of a pluralistic system by suggesting that if fifty colleges were to offer fifty different programs to transmit lofty ideals, it would only serve to demonstrate the genius of the free society and the superiority of diverse and autonomous educational institutions. Continuing in the same vein, the Association of American Colleges (1975) promotes the concept that private higher education is an important — even indispensable — part of the American higher education system. Private higher education adds diversity, offers competition to an otherwise all embracing public system, provides a center of academic freedom removed from political influence, is deeply committed to liberal learning, is concerned for human and individual personality, sets standards, provides educational leadership, and saves money for tax payers, states the Report.

Much has been written lately about the ultimate demise of many private colleges, and some scholars have attempted an explanation of why such predictions have been made. Dan West, writing in the *Educational Record*, (Fall 1982) mentions three reasons why such accounts are written: (1) Higher education scholars who publish articles on the subject are almost always connected with large research universities; (2) Small colleges are undervalued by most people in higher education; (3) Those who write of the small private college tend to overlook the fact that such colleges are subject to market forces in a way that larger institutions are not. Writing in 1968, Christopher Jencks and David Riesman indicated that small Protestant colleges "cannot compete academically . . . nor is there any prospect of their competitive position improving in the forseeable future." (p. 6) In 1981 Riesman noted to an interviewer, however, that although he had suggested earlier that by now half of the private colleges in American should have closed their doors, "I have to ask myself, what did I underestimate in the ingenuity and tenacity of the private, not well-endowed liberal arts college that has enabled so many of them to survive?" (p. 6) West further writes that perhaps the least understood characteristic of many small colleges is their inner spirit. Often precisely because of their smallness, there is an esprit, a sense of community and loyalty, a feeling of pride that provides them with the support base that may be invisible to outsiders but is nonetheless there and can be mustered in time of crises (1982).

Yet, all is not well for the small private college in America, especially the small two-year college in the South, primarily because of cost factors. Nathan Dickmeyer (1982) suggests that tuition setting is the key to the success or failure of many such colleges. In the South, tuition is usually low and less institutional financial aid is offered than in other regions. In the North tuition is

higher but is more heavily discounted with institutionally-funded student aid for many students. While many institutions set their tuition at a competitive level, it nevertheless remains that most private colleges are heavily tuition dependent with an average of fifty-five percent of the educational and general budget accounted for by tuition, with some as high as eighty percent. Enrollment levels generally dictated by tuition rates are therefore critical to the financial health of most private colleges.

Compounding the problem even further is the fact that in order to compete on a national scale for faculty members of quality, private colleges must offer comparable salaries with public institutions. With lower budgets and lower total income, the competitive process is difficult. The "cost of living" may be lower in the South but the per capita income of $9,511 in the region is only ninety percent of the national average of $10,517.

The entire problem of enrollment trends predicted for the 1980's is of concern to all sectors of higher education but perhaps to none more than the private two-year college. Primarily, such institutions believe their salvation lies in the intangibles: loyalty of alumni who are willing, it is hoped, to send their own sons and daughters; the continued support of the church which, in most cases, is providing some type of financial assistance; endowment income which for some colleges is quite substantial and for others, meager; and the general good-will of the community in which they are located. Often community pride in even a small college is such that local businesses are willing to offer emergency support, when necessary, even though the financial impact of the college on the community may be slight.

Since 1970, enrollments in higher education have grown at a compound rate of five percent, ahead of the total population growth of 1.6 percent. The resources used by institutions of higher education have increased from an estimated 1 percent of the gross national product in 1870 to 2.1 percent presently, not including construction (Carnegie Council, 1980). During the next 20 years, enrollments may fall even as the total population continues to rise. Real resources available to colleges and universities also may decline even as the total GNP is increasing. This dramatic new situation has given rise to a great sense of uncertainty within higher education, says the Carnegie Report (1980). To many the situation brings with it fear and to others, hope. Some fear that the private sector will be decimated because it cannot compete because of its higher tuition, while others say that the private sector has great strength to start with and that both the states and federal government will give it increasing support without reducing its autonomy.

In the fall of 1982, overall enrollment in private colleges and universities declined for the first time since 1971, with the number of full-time entering freshmen declining by more than 4 percent. Because of this decline, the nation's private colleges will lose more than a quarter of a billion dollars in tuition revenues in the next four years. Private institutions lost almost 21,000 full-time undergraduates in 1982, but a 9,000 increase in that year in part-time enrollments indicates that students may be shifting from full-time to part-time status as a means of reducing costs. However, two-year private colleges fared better than their four-year counterparts. The average enrollment decline in private two-year colleges was less than one percent with only half showing any kind of decline at all. In the South as a region, 62.3 percent of all private colleges showed a decline (National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities, 1982).

As a further indication of reasons for the decline, census reports show that in 1982, there were 4,087,000 eighteen year-olds in the country, a drop of 1.4 percent from the previous year. Of these, only 66 percent graduated from high school. The actual freshman enrollment in 1982 in all private colleges and universities was 407,390, or about 15 percent of the high school graduates, and 10 percent of all eighteen year-olds. It would appear therefore that one way to forestall further decline in private college enrollments is for the colleges to double their efforts to convince young people of the value of a private college education. Further concern in this area is that the number of freshmen predicted to enroll in private colleges from 1983 to 1987 will drop from 390,525 to 355,530.

Compounding the problem of enrollments even further is the constantly changing nature of American society and the demands of business. According to Harold L. Hodgkinson (1983), the most rapidly growing jobs until 1990 will be Data Processing Machine Mechanics, a growth of 147 percent; Paralegal Personnel, 132 percent; computer systems analysis, 107 percent and computer operators, 88 percent. The private two-year liberal arts college, to maintain its commitment to its heritage, tradition, and philosophy must find some way to add this new "language" to its curriculum along with the humanities. Hodgkinson further iterates that the declining proportion of youth in large segments of America during the decade may mean that many able youth will be able to move directly from high school to a good paying job, either by-passing college entirely (and getting a good education at the college level from an employer who will provide such service) or deferring college for a few years. At the present time over 20 percent of new college enrollees have not come directly from high school, but have "stopped out" for a few years. Private colleges must continually adapt their offerings to the needs of this coterie of older students.

Without regard to the type of higher education they wish to pursue, that is, public or private, the federal government has in the past three decades made it possible for millions of students, through grants and loans based primarily on need, to obtain a college degree. Having grown accustomed to this largesse, both students and college administrators howled loudly when President Reagan suggested that a way of reducing federal spending is to reduce the money available for student aid. The alarming trend of loss of federal support is of great concern to private colleges because of the total student costs involved, and to their students because of the total personal debt possibly accumulated. John Brademus, President of New York University (1982) is of the opinion that students who are forced to pay much more for their education are increasingly likely to choose fields of study solely on the basis of promise of future economic security. Where then, he asks, will our society find its philosophers, its musicians, and its school teachers? In short, where will society find its humanists and public servants? Private colleges, he writes, heavily dependent on tuition for income, are especially endangered by reduction in student aid. Twenty years ago, 50 percent of all college students were enrolled in private institutions. Today only 20 percent are. As quoted by Brademas (1982), President Reagan states that "... if ever the ... independent colleges and universities give way to and are replaced by tax supported institutions, the struggle to preserve academic freedom will have been lost." The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* in an editorial on October 15, 1982, pointed out that while President Reagan "repeatedly has pointed to the private approach as preferable to the governmental, ... it is cold comfort indeed to the private colleges that see their enrollments and, therefore, their futures jeopardized by the policies of this same President."

Lewis Mayhew (1979) suggests that certain colleges probably will not be able to pull through in the 1980's because of financial problems. He sees as particularly vulnerable the private single-sex two-year college that flourished from the 1920's on. Many of the women's colleges were finishing schools, providing young women from moderately financially comfortable homes with a degree of high culture, some vocational preparation, and an opportunity to meet eligible future husbands. The men's institutions met such needs as providing military discipline for young men whose parents had been unable to cope with difficult sons. These institutions began to experience some problems as early as the 1960's as public junior colleges and new state colleges began to compete. A few, such as Stephens College and Colorado Women's College, decided to become four-year institutions and greatly increased their admissions efforts. By the mid-1970's, the adverse factors affecting all of higher education took their toll on the two-year private college. In addition, changing social values lessened the demand for the unique purpose they served and

they found themselves in a weakened financial condition and often suffered a loss of identity.

In spite of the obvious difficulties facing the small, private two-year college, most of them will survive and, indeed, thrive during the remainder of the twentieth century. The demise and extinction of a private college is a violent activity and takes place only after many attempts at resuscitation, including hundreds of committee meetings, strategy sessions, compromise attempts and urgent appeals. Some, at death's doorstep itself, somehow manage to survive and receive new impetus from unexpected sources. Those which do end their existence probably do so because of inept leadership, fiscal mis-management, and lack of vision and planning.

Not only will most of these private, two-year colleges survive, their very survival will help to ensure the continuing strength of the entire system of American higher education. When Douglas Cater recently became President of Washington College, he reminded his audience in his inaugural address (1982) that small colleges indeed are among the endangered species. Survival can be won, he said, by each college distinguishing itself from other small institutions, by demonstrating that the vital signs are more enduring than the predicted death toils. The pursuit of excellence should be the goal since there is already an excess of competition among the mediocre.

The small college must proclaim loudly and clearly its own purpose and mission, and then prove to its constituencies why it deserves to be allowed to exist. The private college must continue to emphasize the importance of examining one's value system as an integral part of learning. Cater (1982) quotes Steven Muller, President of Johns Hopkins: "The modern university is rooted in the scientific method, having essentially turned its back on religion. The scientific method is a marvelous means of inquiry, but it really doesn't provide a value system. The biggest failure in higher education today is that we fall short in exposing students to values." (p. 46). Cater (1982) sees one of the major paths of training in small colleges to be an emphasis on general education. In this area there can be a deepened understanding of ideas and values, which requires the Socratic approach, and a general appreciation of all of the liberal arts.

In a 1976 study for the American Council on Education, Elaine El-Khawas found that the faculty in private liberal arts colleges emphasize the college's role in fostering the emotional and moral development of students. The nurturing of the whole person takes precedence over job training. Such conclusions confirm the view that liberal arts colleges have a distinctive focus not duplicated in community colleges, comprehensive campuses, or research universities, whether public or private. Perhaps more importantly, states West (1982), small colleges are places where real creativity and innovation occur, where ideas can be tested and possibly institutionalized. The wide diversity of religious impulses, entrepreneurial initiatives, cultural and ethnic constituencies, and educational philosophies among the small colleges contributes to the pluralism of our system — one of the greatest strengths of American higher education. It is exceedingly important that those who exalt the diversity of higher education in America understand that small private colleges are an important part of that diversity.

Private two-year colleges differ from their public counterparts in many ways but perhaps primarily in admissions procedures and program offerings. Studiously avoiding the designation of "grades thirteen and fourteen" that some open-door public two-year colleges have attained, most notably in California, private two-year colleges have selective admissions requirements, most based on a combination of factors including the high school diploma, a specific SAT or ACT score, a minimum high school GPA and a prescribed list of pre-college courses. Many also require references, a personal interview, and a health report. Nevertheless, the erroneous conclusion is still wide-spread that a student chooses a two-year college because he is not eligible for entrance to a four-year college or university. This view is given credence by such newspaper reports as the following Associated Press story, released January 9, 1983 (Lexington, Kentucky, *Herald-Leader*, Hal Bock, A.P.): "Curtis Jones was a promising basketball player who made the grades in junior college. He couldn't read and had an IQ between 65 and 73. Billy Mullins won the NCAA 400 meter championship at USC, but his questionable junior-college academic credentials later caused the track team to be placed on probation." It is regrettable that either in order to survive or to enhance an athletic image, or for whatever questionable purpose, many colleges stoop to admitting those who have no business at all in college.

At the time of the Dartmouth College Decision, Daniel Webster argued eloquently for the maintenance of the private institution. "It will be a dangerous, a most dangerous experiment," he said, "to hold these institutions subject to the rise and fall of popular parties and the fluctuation of political opinions." (Quoted in National Commission on United Methodist Higher Education, p. 21.) The Marshall Court gave legal protection to private groups to establish colleges to serve their particular purposes and for those colleges not to be subject to the state control. Private colleges and universities are among the most visible fruits of a pluralistic society. The independent sector can be seen as an aggregate of the distinctive statements of the different groups within the American culture. An independent academic estate is critical to the enhancement of America's diverse cultures and the preservation of personal and group freedom. These independent institutions provide the much needed diversity in education that allows students a wide choice of institutions. Some have noted that the decline of diversity is a product of the states having become the major sponsors of education in the country with consequent homogenization. A strong independent sector can counter the tendency within a state toward homogeneity in purpose and program and counter the pressures toward merely utilitarian objectives by providing an alternative to a state controlled monopoly of higher education. The independent sector can protect freedom of expression from an occasional political abuse not only on its own campuses but on those of state institutions as well.

Private colleges contribute to diversity by their ability to select students, faculty, and trustees in keeping with their stated and functional purposes and by their ability to direct their institutions toward particular purposes, social needs or constituencies. Private colleges, less subject to political shifts in areas such as funding, can maintain their integrity which strengthens academic freedom for all higher education.

Earl McGrath (1981) believes that few subjects should today be of greater concern, not only to educators but to the public at large, than the preservation of independent colleges and universities. Only through the continuation of their services can the well-being of the public system itself be assured. The immunity to government domination which we so far enjoy in America has been largely responsible for the free play of creative energy in adapting institutional services to the emerging needs of a dynamic society, hence our system of higher education has not been hampered from outside by a dictatorial Ministry of Education. All Americans, says McGrath, even those whose lives are involved primarily in the public supported institutions, should commit themselves to the preservation of the independent sector. The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies on Higher Education (1980) maintains that all of higher education must cooperate "to preserve the autonomy and diversity of private higher education." As a part of the private sector, the small private two-year liberal arts college fulfills a distinctive role in American higher education and must continue to do so, for without it the educational welfare of society in general would suffer.

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AUG 12 1983